

Bulgaria: Assistance with Telecommunication System  
Sofia, Bulgaria  
April 28 – May 4, 2002

**Purpose and Background:**

Following the destructive Bulgarian fire season of 2000, a Forest Service Assessment Team funded by USAID traveled to Bulgaria to look at ways to build Bulgaria's fire response capability. (Over US\$35 million was expended by Bulgaria suppressing the fires in 2000.) One of the team's recommendations was to provide basic equipment for 300 initial attack firefighters. This included firefighting clothing, radios, repeater stations, and Bambi water buckets.

The USAID, through the Forest Service, provided for this equipment and supplies. The BLM was requested to:

- 1) consolidate the fire equipment order from various sources and then send it on to Bulgaria as one "package",
- 2) build repeater stations for the 300 radios being purchased.

In order to best understand and respond to the telecommunications needs of their counterparts in the Bulgarian Civil Defense, the Forest Service requested Mr. Royce Shearing, the Chief, Branch of Communications Maintenance, NIFC, to participate in a trip to Bulgaria. The trip was funded by USAID.




**Report:**

The report was prepared by Stephanie Fritz Savolaine, Program Specialist for Russia, NIS & Europe, USDA Forest Service, Office of International Programs.

Bob Becker, Royce Shearing and I completed a very successful trip to Bulgaria last week to discuss the USAID-funded wildfire management program. Our visit provided an opportunity to convene the project management working group for the Bulgaria wildfire program to discuss the plan for project implementation during the next two to three years. The purpose of this e-mail is to summarize key decisions reached during our trip, and provide a bit of reporting about our interaction with our Bulgarian counterparts and USAID.




Participants included:

U.S. Agencies:

-  U.S. Forest Service (Stephanie Savolaine and Bob Becker),
-  Bureau of Land Management (Royce Shearing),
-  USAID (Katia Alexieva),

Bulgarian Agencies:

-  The Civil Protection,
-  The Ministry of Interior,

-  The National Fire and Emergency Safety Services Directorate,
-  The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, and
-  The Ministry of Environment and Water.

Agreements for program implementation and timing:

#### 1) Distribution of equipment

The Forest service will provide the following supplies to our fire management counterparts in Bulgaria:

- 30 Husqvarna chainsaws (delivered to the Civil Protection on April 30 for onward distribution to other Agencies)
- 300 sets of fire protective clothing (Nomex shirt, Nomex jeans and safety helmet)
- 2 Bambi buckets
- 60 Motorola handheld radios
- 3 Motorola or Yaesu radio repeaters

The Working Group agreed that fire equipment (including chainsaws, protective clothing, radios, and repeaters) will be distributed to multiple agencies in the areas surrounding three National Parks/protected areas: Central Balkan, Vitosha and Rila. The attached spreadsheet summarizes the current plans for distribution. The Working Group tentatively agreed that the complete shipment of supplies (with the possible exception of the radio equipment, which may involve specialized procurement procedures) will be deployed from the National Interagency Fire Center on or about June 17. The Civil Protection's Head of Property Management will be responsible for receiving and distributing the equipment to other agencies, and will be the consignee for all equipment at the following address:

Council of Ministers, Civil Protection State Agency  
c/o Mr. Svetlin Stanev  
Head of Property Management Department  
Bulgaria, 1172 Sofia  
30, N. Gabrovski Street

Consistent with previous agreements, the Forest Service Team confirmed that 2 Bambi buckets will be included in the shipment of equipment. The Civil Protection will manage and maintain these buckets, and will preposition them near the National Parks, at the airports in Sofia and Plovdiv. The buckets will be made available to other Agencies during the fire season.

The Forest Service provided samples of protective clothing last week (12 pairs of fire resistant jeans and 15 fire resistant shirts). The Working Group agreed that the Civil Protection will compile a consolidated list of the number of each size required by each Agency. The Civil Protection will e-mail the list to the Forest Service team no later than May 17. (The clothing that we delivered is considered to be a part of the 300 complete

clothing sets that we will provide.)

USAID and the Civil Protection Agency organized a very nice hand-over ceremony for the 30 Husqvarna chainsaws and the sample Nomex clothing, which took place on Tuesday, April 30. The Bulgarian Minister overseeing the Civil Protection portfolio presided over the ceremony, and brief comments were made by Katia Alexieva on behalf of USAID and myself on behalf of the Forest Service. A photograph of the Minister (holding one of our Husqvarna chainsaws) and brief report about our program appeared on the second page of a prominent Bulgarian newspaper on Wednesday, May 1. We were pleased to learn that the Chief of the Bulgarian Forest Service also attended the ceremony, and we presented him with a Smokey Bear lapel pin and an IP pen.

## 2) Training

The Working Group agreed to tentative timing and participants for each planned training course, as summarized in the attached spreadsheet. Course content will be the responsibility of the U.S. Forest Service, while translation will be the responsibility of the Civil Protection Agency. Marianna Hill at the Civil Protection Agency will be the principal point of contact for all U.S. course instructors and translation. Courses will take place at the Civil Protection office building in Sofia, where a conference room and five break-out rooms will be provided.

## 3) Technical exchanges

The first technical exchange will be a 10-day study tour in the U.S. focused on the Incident Command System. Each of the four key Agencies/Ministries will provide one English-speaking participant, and each Agency will fund the airfare for their own participant. The tentative timing for this first exchange will be August 2002.

The second and third technical exchanges, focused on fire fighter skills and aviation management, will take place in 2003 or 2004, if funds are available. The aviation exchange would take place in August and the four to six-month fire fighter exchange would take place between May and November. Fire fighters will be required to pass a fitness test. English language skills are a requirement for the aviation and fire fighter exchange participants.

Bob Becker has been in contact with several Forest Service staff who have expressed interest and availability to serve as instructors and/or hosts for the planned CY2002 program activities. We will provide more information, including names and contact information, as we receive final confirmation of availability.

## Conclusions:

On a final note, Bob, Royce and I felt that this was a very successful trip on several levels. We were pleased to see that the relevant fire

management agencies were cooperating well, and that equipment and training opportunities were being shared fairly among the agencies that have actual responsibilities for wild fire response in the field. The Government of Bulgaria has clearly made a commitment to inter-agency coordination in wildfire management, and this seems to be supported at the highest levels within the relevant ministries and agencies.

USAID/Sofia was very positive about the program in general, and about the progress made during the course of this visit. Our counterparts at the USAID Mission mentioned several times that they believe that they are getting a lot of "bang for their buck" through the Forest Service, and they understand that this is due in large part to the in-kind contributions of staff time and expertise that the Forest Service will be able to leverage during the implementation of this program. We are certainly off to a promising start!